

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

The listing of claims below replaces all prior versions of claims in the application.

1. (Currently Amended): A method of drying a coating film formed by application of a coating solution to a ~~long-length~~ web substrate which is traveling,

drying being done immediately after the application of said coating solution to said ~~long-length~~ web substrate, with an evaporation rate of a solvent kept at  $0.1 \text{ g / m}^2 \cdot \text{s}$  or less.

2. (Currently Amended): The method of drying a coating film as set forth in claim 1, characterized in that said drying is done until said ~~long-length~~ web substrate coated with said coating solution enters a drying system.

3. (Currently Amended): The method of drying a coating film as set forth in claim 1, characterized in that a plate parallel to said ~~long-length~~ web substrate immediately after being coated with said coating solution is provided with an air gap between said plate and said coating film, and said drying is done during travel of said coating film through said gap.

4. (Original): The method of drying a coating film as set forth in claim 3, characterized in that a temperature of said plate is controlled to be not less than a dew point of vapors of said coating solution.

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5. (Currently Amended): The method of drying a coating film as set forth in claim 3, characterized in that a fin is provided on a surface of said plate on a side facing said ~~long-length~~ web substrate.

6. (Previously Presented): The method of drying a coating film as set forth in claim 1, characterized in that said coating film is formed as an optically functional layer with an optical function.

7. (Withdrawn): An optical film having a laminated structure comprising said optically functional layer formed by the method of drying a coating film as set forth in claim 6.

8. (Withdrawn): A polarizing plate having the optical film as set forth in claim 7.

9. (Withdrawn): An image display system comprising the polarizing plate as set forth in claim 8.

10. (Currently Amended): A method of drying a coating film formed by application of a coating solution to a ~~long-length~~ web substrate which is traveling, characterized in that

a plate having a plate width of not less than a width of said ~~long-length~~ web substrate is provided along a travel path of said ~~long-length~~ web substrate on a downstream side of a coating system for said coating solution, and

said ~~long-length~~ web substrate immediately after a coating film is formed thereon by said coating system travels along said travel path, with said coating film facing a plate surface of said plate with a predetermined gap, whereby at least part of said coating film is dried while passing through said gap.

11. (Currently Amended): The method of drying a coating film as set forth in claim 10, characterized in that

said plate is provided as a first plate, and a second plate which is opposed with a predetermined space to a surface of said ~~long-length~~ web substrate on a side opposite to the side where said coating film is formed, is provided almost parallel to said first plate, and

a ~~long-length~~ web substrate immediately after said coating film is formed thereon travels through an air gap between said first and second plates.

12. (Currently Amended): The method of drying a coating film as set forth in claim 10, characterized in that a plurality of convex structures, each extending in a direction nearly orthogonal to a direction of travel of said ~~long-length~~ web substrate, are arranged approximately parallel to an underside of said plate along said direction of travel.

13. (Currently Amended): The method of drying a coating film as set forth in claim 10, characterized in that said plate is provided as one side of a flat tunnel structure which surrounds a travel path of said ~~long-length~~ web substrate.

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14. (Previously Presented): The method of drying a coating film as set forth in claim 10, characterized in that a temperature of said plate is controlled to be not less than a dew point of vapors of said coating solution